

Head of DEC pans new St. Lawrence Seaway study

State urges Army Corps to drop plan

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There is no reason to continue considering expansion of the St. Lawrence Seaway and the Great Lakes shipping channels, the commissioner of the state's Department of Environmental Conservation said in a letter to an Army Corps of Engineers official.

Commissioner Erin M. Crotty said in a letter to Wayne F. Schloop, project manager for the initial corps study, that the economic effects of expansion outlined by the corps are questionable and the environmental impacts understated and that two policy obstacles were left unaddressed.

"For these reasons, further investment in the GLNS (Great Lakes Navigation Study) is not justified," she said. "The significant amount of funding needed to conduct the study could be spent more effectively on programs that would enhance our existing efforts to further protect and restore the Great Lakes environment, thereby creating a much broader array of economic opportunities throughout the region."

The corps finished a study of the benefits of expanding the St. Lawrence Seaway and the Great Lakes shipping channels last June and wants to continue with the more expensive feasibility study. The second study would cost about \$30 million.

The report proposed deepening the Seaway channel from its present depth of 26.25 feet to 35 feet. The report also proposes increasing the width of the locks from 80 feet to 110 feet and the length from 766 feet to 1,200 feet.

Mr. Schloop said he had not received the letter and therefore could not comment on it.

Enclosed with the letter was an outline of potential environmental impacts that have not been addressed by the study, including the effects of dredging and blasting, an increased number invasive species and the increased chance of oil spills.

Most notably, the outline said the corps has not considered how to dispose of dredged soil contaminated with industrial byproducts such as mercury and PCBs.

"Further, the reconnaissance study ... assumes the most dramatic environmental impacts to the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River ecosystem have already occurred," Mrs. Crotty said. "The department strenuously disagrees with this assumption. This assumption is unsubstantiated and lacks support among the Great Lakes scientific, natural resource management and environmental communities."

"Overall, the department believes implementing such a project would result in significant environmental impacts to the natural resources within the connecting channels and lower Great Lakes' basin," she said.

"In addition, all of the options for economic evaluation seem to depend entirely on option two," she said. "This option involves the deepening and rebuilding of the Welland Canal and MLO component of the Seaway. However, option 2 was omitted from the reconnaissance analysis due to lack of information."

The Welland Canal is near St. Catharines, Ontario.

Mrs. Crotty said the policy obstacles are related to water levels in the Great Lakes Region.

"First, implementation of the connecting channel's deepening improvements would likely modify the hydrologic system by increasing the outflow of water through the connecting channels of the Great Lakes Basin," she said. "This could be construed as a new and/or increased diversion of water from the Great Lakes Basin, which could be in direct conflict of the

water conservation principles of the Great Lakes Charter and the Annex 2001 amendment agreed to by the Great Lakes Governors and Premiers."

Mrs. Crotty said the change in water levels would also conflict with the Lake Ontario-St. Lawrence Study, which New York has invested considerable effort to support.

Stephanie G. Weiss, executive director of Save the River Inc., a Clayton-based environmental group, said this is another victory for her group and the entire St. Lawrence region.

"The main thing this means is that there is a state agency that is recognizing the shortcomings of the corps' plan," she said. "This is the document we've been waiting for, stating, yes this is just a plan, but it's a bad plan."